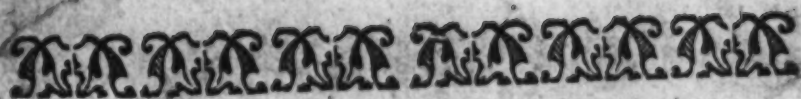


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V O W S

I N

T R O U B L E .



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THE ROYAL MUSEUM

V O W S



THE ROYAL MUSEUM

THE ROYAL MUSEUM

August 4/1: 1732
O my God help me to
perform my duty
with i have made
The This day from water

V O W S
I N
T R O U B L E,
Or a Plain and Practical 14
D I S C O U R S E

Concerning the
N A T U R E of V O W S made
in Trouble; and the Reason-
ableness and Necessity of a faith-
ful Performance of them.

By JOHN HORSLEY, A.M. <

PSALM lxvi. 13, 14.

*I will go into thy House with Burnt-Offerings:
I will pay Thee my Vows which my Lips have
uttered, and my Mouth hath spoken when I
was in Trouble.*

L O N D O N:

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Introduction.

TH E Case of *Vows in Trouble* is so very frequent and common, that I have oft wonder'd we have had no plain and practical Discourse *directly* and *peculiarly* adapted thereunto. I have oft had Occasion, and wish'd for some little Book on this Subject, to put at a proper Time into the Hands of some People, who needed such a Monitor, and to whom, by a

divine Blessing, it might have been very useful. After having for many Years wish'd and enquir'd to no purpose, for some Performance of some abler Hand on this Subject, I have, at last, ventur'd to publish somewhat upon it my self. If this either excite some other better qualify'd Person, to treat on the same Subject to greater Advantage, or should it self be serviceable to any in an Affair which most nearly concerns them, I shall think my Labour well bestow'd, and would desire to give the Glory to him, to whom alone it is due.

Every

Introduction.

vii

Every body knows how common it is for Persons to take up seemingly strong Resolutions, and to make great Promises, and solemn Vows, when they are in Distress, Danger or Trouble; and yet every Body also knows, how generally such Promises and Vows are afterwards neglected and broken, the faithful Performance being as rare as the Vows and Engagements themselves are frequent and common. Who is there that may not so far join with the Psalmist, as to say, that he is under some *Vows* and Promises *which his Lips have utter'd, and his Mouth hath spoken when he was in Trouble?*

But, alas! how rare do these Persons appear, who imitate the Psalmist's Example, and heartily join with him in the other part of that Text, by *paying* faithfully to God, when they are *out of Trouble*, those *Vows* which they made to him when they were *in it*? Yea, how much do even the best Men fail and come short of that exact and punctual Performance which God may justly expect and require? So that I cannot but think that such a Discourse as this must be proper, and may be useful, not only to some particular Persons, but to all in the general, since there is scarce any body but who is more or less concern'd in this Matter.

Affliction cometh not forth of the Dust, neither doth Trouble spring out of the Ground, Job v. 6. It comes not by Chance, or of its own accord, but is order'd and appointed by a God of infinite Wisdom, and therefore in our Trouble we should look to the Hand from whence it comes, *Seek unto God, ver. 8.* yea, in our *Affliction we should seek him early, Hos. v. 15.* God often sends these Troubles upon this very Errand, even to awaken the Mind to a more lively Sense of Sin and Duty, to call Men to Repentance for former Transgressions and former Neglects, and to bring them under

new

new and strong Engagements for the future: Resolutions and *Vows* to amend and reform, are what God seems to expect from Men in these Circumstances. He *smites them in vain* when somewhat of this Nature does not follow upon it. But then he also justly expects a *Performance* of these *Vows*, an actual Reformation and Amendment suitable to these Engagements. *God will not be mocked*, nor is he to be put off with empty Words and fair Promises only. And therefore to perswade all who have come under such Engagements, punctually to *pay* what they have solemnly *vow'd* and *promis'd*, and to assist and direct them

in

in the Performance, is the Design of the following Treatise. And that it may be serviceable to these good Purposes, I recommend it to the divine Blessing, which alone can make it successful.

The Method observ'd in the Treatise appears at once, from the following *Contents* of the several Chapters.



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VOWS



VOWS

I N

TROUBLE.



CHAP. I.

*Concerning the Nature of Vows in the
General, and particularly of those
made in Trouble.*

MY Design and Resolution being
to keep to what is serious and
practical, I shall wave all nice
Speculations, and unedifying
Disputes about the *Nature of Vows*, and
all those more difficult than useful *Questi-*
ons,

ons, which may be, and have been started concerning this Subject. If we consult either Scripture or Reason, it is evident that such Debates should in all Cases whatever be rather shunn'd than desir'd, or sought for. But more especially should they be avoided in so grave and solemn a Subject as this.

Whatever therefore the *Manner of some may be*, I shall content my self with making two or three general, and (as I apprehend) useful and necessary Remarks on this Subject, shunning industriously *those Niceties, which may minister Questions rather than edifying*, 1 Tim. i. 4.

Such Vows then, as I am about to discourse of, may be thus defin'd in the general, *viz. They are solemn Promises made to God, of doing somewhat that may be for his Glory, and our own spiritual Good; or of shunning what may be*
against

against both; which Promises are expressed to God, and before him in a solemn Manner, some how or other. Of this Nature was that solemn and general Vow or Oath of the Psalmist, *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous Judgments* — Such an Oath as this is exactly of the same Nature with such a Vow as I am at present describing.

I might here consider at large the *Object*, the *Manner*, and the *Matter* of such a Vow: But I shall but just touch upon each of these Heads.

First, God is the *Object* of such religious Vows, as I am speaking of; or, he is the Person to whom they are to be made. Unto him should the Vow be made, and unto him should the Vow be perform'd, Psal. lxxv. 1. We must vow, and pay unto the Lord our God, Psal.

lxxvi. 11. Such Vows are therefore called the *Vows of God* in Scripture. *Thy Vows are upon me, O God*, Psal. lvi. 12. The same Psalmist calls them *his own Vows*, in another place. *That I may daily perform MY Vows*, Psal. lxi. 8. (and in some other places). They were GOD's *Vows*, as the Obligation was *to him*, and the Right to require a Performance was *in him*. Or, in much the same Sense, as any Act or Part of Religion is call'd *God's Service*. 'Tis his Right and Due. Nor do the Vows I am insisting upon, convey any new Right to God which he had not before. They are rather *solemn Acknowledgments* of God's prior Right and Property, his most just Title to us, and all our Services, and all that we *have* and *are*.

They were the *Psalmist's Vows*, and they are *ours*, as they are our Act and Deed, and we stand engag'd to perform them.

Second-

Secondly, The particular *Manner* of making, or entring into these *Vows*, may be different: Or the Way of *expressing* them *to* God, and *before him*, may vary. For sometimes they are express'd in *Words*, sometimes in *Writing*: Sometimes the Declaration may be *only* to God, and that too, perhaps, implicit or mental, (though thoroughly known to him :) Sometimes the Declaration may be more explicit and open, and *other* *Witnesses* be also admitted.

The Vows which the Psalmist was so careful to perform, were such as his LIPS HAD UTTERED, and his MOUTH HAD SPOKEN, *when he was in Trouble*, Psal. lxi. 13, 14.

Judab enter'd into a Covenant to seek the Lord God of their Fathers, with all their Heart and all their Soul — And they

they swear unto the Lord WITH A LOUD VOICE, 2 Chron. xv. 12, 14.

Upon another Occasion they say, *We make a sure Covenant, and WRITE it,* Neh. ix. 38.

Sometimes the Declaration is made *only to God*, when no other Persons are present, or Witnesses to it. Thus *Jacob*, in that affecting and remarkable Vow of his, Gen. xxviii. 20, 21. declares in a solemn Manner his Resolution to God; and before him, tho' it does not appear there were any Witnesses to this Declaration. *Jacob vowed a Vow, SAYING, If God will be with me, and keep me in this Way that I go, and will give me Bread to eat, and Raiment to put on, so that I come back again to my Father's House in Peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this Stone which I have set for a Pillar shall be God's House, and of all that*

3. that

that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the Tenth unto thee.

Hannah vowed a Vow, and said as follows in that Verse, 1 Sam. i. 2. Tho' she spoke in her Heart, and her Voice was not heard; Ver. 13. But the Psalmist seems to have been more open in his Vows, and to have admitted many Witnesses to them, and therefore he resolves to make the Performance of them so publick. The Vows that were made before many of God's People, he resolves to pay before them all. Psal. cxvi. 14, 18. I will pay my Vows unto the Lord, now in the Presence OF ALL HIS PEOPLE — which is twice repeated in the two Verses.

But whether there be more Witnesses to our Vows, or none but God, and our own Consciences; our Obligation to a faithful Performance of them is solemn and

and strong. And it is surely much more material to consider the Solemnity and Strength of the Obligation, than the particular Form or Manner of it. And with Respect to God, who knows the least and most secret Pointings and Tendency of our Souls, it may be the same whether our Vows are more implicit and mental, or more express; and whether they be express'd in Word or Writing, though the one way may be of more Use to our selves than the other. What stands upon Record may be of more lasting Service to us, upon account of its continued awakening Force, and repeated Impressions upon us, if the divine Presence and Blessing concur.

Thirdly, As to the *Matter* of these Vows, it is certain that it ought to be *Lazeful* or *Necessary*. To vow that which is sinful, is to incur Guilt and Sin, by making such a Vow; and to perform

it would be to double the Crime. Too many, indeed, do in their Trouble only *meditate and vow* Revenge, upon those whom they apprehend to have been the Instruments or Occasions of it. But this *their Way is their Folly*. Oh ! *my Soul, enter not into their Designs or Counsels* ; for it is Wickedness to vow private Revenge, and doubly wicked to execute it.

I remember, as I was (not many Years ago) travelling upon the high Road, I saw a Crowd of People gather'd together for the Sight of a Horse Race ; one of the two Riders having got a desperate Fall, was carried into a House by the Wayside, and, as I was told, there remain'd but little Hopes of his Life. As I passed by I heard even these People, who seem'd themselves to have no great Sense of Religion, telling with Concern, that he whose Life was despair'd of, spent his whole

whole Time in swearing and vowing Revenge upon his Competitor (if he surviv'd his present Danger.) How melancholy a Thing is it, to hear Men spending their last Breath in dreadful Imprecations on themselves, or in impious Vows and Wishes for Revenge upon others? Thus beginning their Hell upon Earth, with horrid Blasphemies in their Mouths, and Rage and Revenge in their Hearts, or impotent, fruitless Desires and Wishes for it: *Fruitless*, I mean, with respect to others, though tormenting enough to themselves. Nothing that is criminal or wicked in it self, can rightly be made the Matter of a *religious Vow*. This carries an apparent Contradiction and Inconsistency in it.

Not to take Notice, that a *natural Impossibility* cannot be the proper Matter of a *religious Vow*, I would observe, that when Things *merely* Indifferent or Lawful

ful are made the Matter of our solemn Vows and Engagements; Snares and Hazard do too often attend them. And therefore I cannot but think it the most prudent, because the most safe, to make plain and necessary Duty the Matter of our Vows, or at least what may be directly and evidently subservient to it. As what is downright Wicked must be flatly contrary to the Religion of such a Vow; so what is purely Trifling appears not to be agreeable to the awful Solemnity of it.

What God requires, and what through divine Grace we may be enabled to perform, are the proper Materials for such religious Vows and Promises as I am discoursing about. The more Indifferent, or the more Doubtful the Matter of a Vow is, the less eligible, I conceive, it must be.

And

And surely, it becomes and concerns all, to consider the Matter of their Vows before they engage. It is much better to do this, than *after Vows to make Enquiry*, Prov. xx. 25. It is better *not to be rash* than afterwards to *say before the Angel that it was an Error*, Eccles. v. 2, 6.

To *do Good*, or to *be so*, or not to *do Evil*, is the most proper, as it is the most usual Matter of Vows made in Trouble. I say then, that the Vows which ought to be, and generally in Fact are, made in Trouble, may be reduc'd to these Three general Heads. *First*, Vows of *being Good*. *Secondly*, Vows of *doing Good*. *Thirdly*, Vows of *refraining from Evil*.

First, How common is it for Persons in any Sickness or Danger, or under any
Trou-

Trouble, to resolve and promise, that they will become *new Men*, steer a different Course, and lead another Life, than they have done heretofore? Oh! how often do they cry out, and say, "If God will but preserve me in this Sickness or Danger, or vouchsafe such a Mercy or Deliverance to me; if God will yet spare me, and try me a while longer, I'll be another Man, and lead another Life, than I have done;" their Prayer then is, *Let me live that I may praise and serve thee*, Psal. cxix. 175. *Loose thou my Bonds and I will be thy Servant; hear now the Voice of my Supplication, and I will call upon thee as long as I live*, Psal. cxvi. Then every one would believe, that they sincerely desir'd Life, for no other End, than for that alone, for which it is desirable, *viz.* to serve God here, and to prepare for the eternal Enjoyment of him hereafter. How glad would they then be, to hear such Words as these, *That they*

they should not die but live and declare the Works of the Lord? Psal. cxviii.

17. The worst of Men desire to *die the Death of the Righteous*, and would have their latter End to be like theirs: And therefore when they apprehend that their Lives draw near to an End, and that they are just entering into Eternity; they then wish that they had liv'd like the Righteous, and resolve and promise that they will live like them for the Future, if by God's Favour and Mercy their Life should be prolong'd and continu'd to them: They are then made sensible how sad a Thing it is to be unmeet for another World, when they must quickly leave that which they are in at the present; they see that their *former Way was their Folly*, and they promise to act more wisely for the Future, if they have Opportunity for it.

Secondly, How often do Men under Trouble promise or vow to perform such and such Duties hitherto omitted by them, or to discharge them in a better Manner than they were wont heretofore? The Omission, or careless Performance of Duty is sinful, as well as the Commission of Sin: We offend against God and his Law, as well when we neglect to do what he requires of us, as when we do that which he has forbid us; and Men may even for their Neglects and Omissions be justly condemn'd by God at the last. So was the slothful Servant that hid his Talent in a Napkin: And these Sins of Omission lie many times very heavy on a Man's Conscience when he comes to die. How many excellent Men have at that Time grievously complain'd of these Sins, and mourn'd very bitterly over them? They were some of the last Words of the Learned and Pious Arch-

bishop *Usher*, *Lord*, *pardon my Sins of Omission*. And if the best of Men find so much Reason to complain of their sinful Omissions, how much more Reason have others to do so, were their Consciences but as tender, and as sensible of them? Now, when this is the Case, no wonder if Men under Trouble, or when they look upon themselves as drawing near to Eternity, do resolve and promise to be more constant and diligent in the Performance of Duty, and to discharge some Duties they have omitted heretofore. Even *Pharaoh* himself, when under Trouble, promises, according to God's Order, to let the Children of *Israel* go, though, when the Lord removes the Judgment, he recedes from his Promise again. When Persons are under Affliction and Trouble, then they *seek the Lord early*, and their Language is, *SPEAK LORD, FOR THY SERVANT HEARETH; whatever Duty thou requirest, I here,*
in

in thy Strength, stand ready and resolv'd to perform it. Oh, that the same Frame and Temper did ever continue, and not cease with the Affliction and Trouble! When Men are under Trouble, what fair Promises do they make, that they will think and talk more of God and his Ways, that they will read and hear his Word with more Attention and Affection than ever, and that they will henceforward be more frequent and fervent in Prayer, and that, if *God will now hear the Voice of their Supplication, they will call upon him so long as they live*, and that at another rate than they have done?

Thirdly, How commonly do Men under Trouble resolve and promise for the Future, more carefully to avoid and refrain from such and such Sins? When they taste the bitter Fruits of Sin, they are then ready to vow and protest against

it, though it may be they are afterwards too easily deluded by the deceitful Pleasures thereof. Trouble commonly removes the Mask from Sin, and gives them a right View of it, and no wonder if when they have that, they vow and protest against it, since Sinners are deceiv'd and impos'd upon by the false Colours and Appearances of it. If any have been addicted to any particular Vice, what Vows will they frequently make against it, when they are in Danger and Trouble? Then each Sinner seems determin'd *to forsake his unrighteous Way*. The Children of *Israel* oft brought themselves into Trouble by sinning against God; and then, when in Trouble, they oft seem'd resolv'd, and set against those Sins which brought their Trouble upon them; and so it is with a great many others. The Drunkard, the Whoremonger, the profane Swearer, &c. in his Distress and Trouble, will readily vow and declare him-

himself resolv'd against all such Vice for the Future. If God will but spare him, and his own most solemn Engagements could be rely'd on, he'll Drink excessively no more; he'll never Swear profanely, or commit Uncleannefs again: And this is particularly remarkable with respect to the Sin of Drunkennefs. When Men have ruin'd their Health, or sunk their Estates by Intemperance, and find their Lives in great Danger, or themselves reduc'd to great Straits: How heartily, to all Appearance, will they vow, and protest against that Crime, which has brought them into so great Danger, or involv'd them in so great Distress and Perplexity? And yet in too many Instances, we see the vicious Person return to the same Practices again, notwithstanding all his Protestations against it, and all that he has suffered by it.

But

But now, if such Things as these be the *Matter of Vows in Trouble*, it may be, and has been objected, To what Purpose should any make such Promises and Vows, since they were as strongly obliged before as they can be afterwards? To perform Duty, and to avoid Sin, *to do Good*, and *to cease to do Evil*, is what we ever were, and are oblig'd to; and therefore, to what Purpose should we bind our selves by any such Engagements as these? To this it is easy to answer, that how strong soever the Obligation was before, consider'd in it self, and with relation to God: Yet such Vows have their proper Use and Force *upon us*. We hereby apply the prior Obligation closer to our selves, we set it more home upon our own Consciences, and by being awaken'd and render'd more Attentive, we more sensibly feel the Force and Power of it. 'Tis true, God had oblig'd us before
by,

by his Command and Authority: But we have now, as it were, ty'd the Bond upon our selves with our own Hands, and we have subjected our selves to another Command of God, which requires the *Payment*, and the *speedy Payment* of our Vows when we have made them. And this *twofold Cord*, perhaps, may not be so *easily broken*.

For my part, I would not be forward to advise any to make, or pretend to make *new Laws*, or *new Duties*, by their new Vows. But as the proper Use of such Vows is only to strengthen the Bond with respect to our selves, or to tie it more closely upon our selves, in order to the more certain and ready Performance of what was our indispensable Duty previous to these Engagements: So this is the Use I would in the Sequel perswade all to make of them. May they be Spurs to our trifling, lingring Souls! So as
that

that we may break through all Delays and Difficulties, and say no more with the Sluggard — *There is a Lion in the Way*, Prov. xxvi. 13.



C H A P. II.

Under what Kind of Troubles are People so much disposed, and so apt to make solemn Vows and Promises to God.

I Propose in this Chapter to mention some particular Troubles, which when People are under, they are ready to make such Vows as I have been describing.

First, Inward Trouble of Mind. When *Mens Hearts smite them*, and they are uneasy and troubled in their Minds, how ready are they then to resolve and promise,

mise, to be and do so and so, what they have not been or done heretofore? Convictions produce such kind of Resolutions, and such sort of Vows. The Sinner, after he has committed his Sin, and the Pleasure of it is over, and instead thereof he feels only a dire, bitter Remorse, is then apt to resolve and promise, that he'll never commit the like Iniquities again. Or when a close pungent Discourse, by the Blessing of God, and the Concurrence of his Spirit, *pricks the Sinner to the very Heart*, then is he ready to say, *If I have done Iniquity I will do so no more* — Or sometimes an awakening Providence may excite this Concern in his Mind, and occasion such Resolutions and Vows. When *Saul* was under some inward Concern and Conviction, he promises that he would not attempt again to do any Harm to *David*, 1 Sam. xxvi. 21. *Then said Saul, I have sinned, Return my Son David, for I will no more do thee harm,*

*harm, because my Soul was precious in
thine Eyes this Day: Behold I have
played the Fool, and have erred exceed-
ingly — When the Sinner tastes the
bitter Fruits and Effects of Sin, he's
then apt to vow that he'll taste the Plea-
sure of it no more.*

*Inward Trouble for Sin produces Re-
solutions against it, and often ends in a
sincere and unfeign'd Repentance, 2 Cor.
vii. 9, 10, 11. Now I rejoice, not that ye
were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed
to Repentance — for godly Sorrow
worketh Repentance to Salvation not to
be repented of, &c. — Though some-
times these Resolutions wear off with the
Convictions and Sorrow, and all the
Vows and Promises they made under this
Trouble are forgot and neglected, when
they are out of it. Conviction indeed is
the Way to Conversion, yet true Con-
version does not always follow Convicti-*

on. However, so far is certain, that such Convictions, such inward Remorse and Trouble, are usually attended with some Resolutions, some Vows and Promises, to reform and amend what has occasion'd so much Grief and Sorrow to them, or to ask with the awakened Jaylor, *What they must do to be saved?* When *Felix* trembled at *Paul's* Discourse about *Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come*, he seems to have resolv'd to have made some farther Enquiry into that Matter, and promises, that when he had a convenient Season he would call for the Apostle again, *Acts* xxiv. 25. But these Impressions seem to have gone off in *Felix*, as, alas! they do in a great many others.

Secondly, Sometimes Persons make such Promises and Vows when they meet with worldly Disappointments and Troubles, or when they are pinch'd and per-

D

plex'd,

plex'd, or straiten'd here. They hereby see the *Vanity* and *Emptiness* of this World; and thereupon resolve and vow, that they will not prize it so much, nor be so much impos'd upon by it for the Future, as they have been heretofore. Or when Men are under any great Perplexity or Trouble, or in any great Want or Distress, how often do they then vow to do so and so for God, if he will do so and so for them. If God will do such great Things for them, they will do as great Things for him as they are able. *Jacob's Vow* is an eminent Instance of this, *Gen. xxviii. 20, 21. And Jacob vowed a Vow, SAYING, If God will be with me, and keep me in this Way that I go, and will give me BREAD TO EAT, AND RAIMENT TO PUT ON, so that I come again to my Father's House in Peace: Then shall the Lord be my God.* When Men are perplex'd and puzzled, how apt are they to vow, That if the all-wise God
will

will teach them the Way they should chuse, and direct and guide them now, they will ever follow his Direction and Conduct? Or, if they be in Want or Distress, why then, if the Lord will provide for them the Supports of Life, their Life and Strength should be employ'd in his Service. Oh, that Men were as careful to perform their Vows, in such Cases, as they are ready to make them!

Thirdly, When Persons are in any great Danger, or any Trouble of such a Nature as this, how ready are they to vow and promise great Things to God, if he will but preserve them, or vouchsafe Deliverance to them? Oh! say they, *If God will preserve me at this Time, bring me out of this Danger: if he'll now bear my Voice, I'll be HIS SERVANT, and CALL UPON HIM AS LONG AS I LIVE.* And this is a common Case indeed with those that are at Sea, and do

Business in great Waters, when they are in the utmost Distress, *then they cry unto the Lord in their Trouble, and he bringeth them out of their Distress*, Psal. cvii. Then they pray, and vow, and promise. When Danger threatens to put an end to their Lives; they then are troubled at their having liv'd so ill, and promise to enter upon a new Course of Life, if it shall please God to continue them. Tho' generally, when the Danger is over, they are just the same Persons that they formerly were; and this their Religion proves but as the *morning Cloud*, and as *the early Dew that quickly passeth away*. But *Jonah* vow'd in such a Case, and paid unto the Lord. *Jonah* ii. 9. *I will pay Thee that I have vowed.*

Fourthly, When People are under Sicknes, and apprehend themselves to be upon a Death-bed, then they frequently make many solemn Vows and
Pro-

Promises to God. *Oh! say they, If God will but spare me this Time, and add a few Days or Years more unto my Life, I'll live at another rate than ever I have done as yet; I'll Drink and Swear, and be guilty of Uncleanness no more; I'll be more constant and fervent in every Duty, and more circumspect and watchful in the whole Course of my Conversation.* Which of us have not been *Ear Witnesses* to such Vows and Promises, and (which is greatly to be lamented) afterwards been *Eye Witnesses* too, in a great many Instances, of the sad Breach and Violation of them? We have heard them made with a great deal of Earnestness, and seeming Sincerity, and yet have quickly seen them broken. The Psalmist seems to have made his Vow upon some such Occasion, *Psal. cxvi. 3, 4. The Sorrows of Death compassed me, and the Pains of Hell took hold upon me, I found Sorrow and Trouble, then called*

I upon the Name of the Lord, &c. —
 And that these Cries to God were accompanied with some Vows and Promises too, seems plain from the latter Part of the Psalm, where the Psalmist says once and again, *I will pay my Vows unto the Lord now, in the Presence of all his People.*



C H A P. III.

That Men are apt to make solemn Vows to God when they are in Trouble, and to neglect them when they are out of it. Some general Hints at the Reasons both of the one and the other.

IT is as certain as Observation or Experience can make any Thing, that Men in Distress and Trouble are ready to make such Vows

to God, as I have describ'd and been insisting upon. Then Prayers and Vows are often heard from those, who seem'd not before to have had any Regard to God or Religion. *When the Sorrows of Death compass them, and the Pains of Hell get hold of them, and they find Trouble and Sorrow, then do they call upon the Name of the Lord — O Lord, I beseech Thee deliver my Soul —* And as the Psalmist did so do they, join *Vows* to their *Prayers*; Vows against Sin, and Vows of stricter Obedience. And whereas in the Time of their Health and Prosperity, perhaps even gross Sins gave them little Concern or Disturbance, now smaller Offences make them very uneasy, and they are dispos'd even to resolve and protest against these.

This Matter of Fact can be contested by none who have convers'd in the World: And the Reasons of it too are also

also very obvious. I shall only touch thereupon in the general.

Solomon's Advice is remarkable, Eccl. vii. 14. — In the Day of Adversity consider. Men are much dispos'd to consider when they are in Adversity. Whilst they are prosperous in this World, and drown'd in carnal Delights, and sensual Pleasures, they give not themselves leave or time to consider, what is like to be the End and Issue of all. But Trouble brings them to consider what they are doing, and whether they are going. And a little Consideration is sufficient to determine them, and to bring them to some proper Resolutions, where the Case is so plain. Upon this therefore they seem to be determin'd to be for God, and not for another, and readily come under such solemn Vows and Engagements as I have describ'd and mention'd before.

Again,

Again, the Consciences of Men are usually by Trouble rouzed and awakened out of their Sleep and Security. And when Conscience is allow'd full and free liberty to speak, 'tis easy to discern on what Side it will declare, and how loudly it will call on such Persons to repent, reform and amend. And in such a Case, how natural is it for such Persons, to ~~vow~~ and promise Amendment. When they are once convinc'd that *their former Way was their Folly*, no wonder if they readily engage and vow to pursue it no more.

Besides, upon these Occasions, Persons usually have more lively Apprehensions of a future Judgment and an eternal World. And there are few, but who would be happy in the other World, when they think they are to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin (which are but for a
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Season) no more. The natural Consequence of this is, great Promises and solemn Vows, of living the Life of the Righteous, and making due Preparations for Eternity, if it should please God to vouchsafe them more Time, and farther Opportunities for doing so.

Again, Trouble often opens the Eyes of People, and gives them a clearer View of the Evil of Sin, at the same Time too that it renders them incapable of relishing the Delights and Pleasures thereof. And when they are no longer deceived by the false Colours and glittering Appearance of Sin, and when they find neither Profit nor Pleasure by it, no wonder if they then easily come under some solemn Vows and Engagements against it. When the Body is full of Pain or Disorder, or the Mind full of Trouble, where then is the Pleasure of Sin? Yea, perhaps, the Persons afflicted are

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convinc'd and made sensible, that such and such Sins have brought these very Troubles upon them, and therefore do they readily vow and protest against them.

Again, Men never are so sensible of the Vanity of this World as when they are in Trouble. They then see its Emptiness, and the Insufficiency of it, and all that's in it, to make them easy or happy, its utter Inability to help or relieve them in the Time of their Trouble. Danger, Sicknefs, Pain, &c. imbitters to the Soul every Thing the World affords, and makes it cry out in good earnest, *Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity.* And when this is the Case, how much does this help such Persons to direct their Thoughts to a better World? How much does it dispose them to take up strong Resolutions to *seek another and a better Country, to seek the Kingdom of God and his*
Righte-

Righteousness, and to lay themselves under some solemn Ties and Engagements to do so?

For these, and such like Reasons, are Vows made in Trouble so frequent and common. I may say 'tis almost natural for Persons in Distress and Trouble to make some such Vows: At least it is certain, that the Heathens, who had only Reason and the Light of Nature to guide and direct them, did often, upon such Occasions, make some kind of Vows to their Gods. How common were the *votive Altars* among the Romans, *Pro Salute, i. e.* for *Safety* or *Welfare*? And how evident is it, that these *Vows* were frequently made in a Time of Danger or Distress? We Christians too, have an *Altar* and a *Sacrifice*, but not of our own erecting or providing. And yet it well becomes us to resolve, through divine Assistance, to secure an Interest in

this

this *grand Propitiatory Sacrifice*. This is more especially proper, and suitable under inward Trouble of Mind, for Christ only can give Ease and Rest to *troubled Souls*, Mat. xi. 27, 28, 29. Besides some other Things, that may very aptly be made the Matter of such Vows, are sometimes spoken of in Scripture under the Notion of a *Christian Sacrifice*. But to do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such Sacrifices God is well pleas'd, Heb. xiii. 16. The charitable Gift of the *Philippians* is called — *An Odour of a sweet Smell, a Sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God*, Phil. iv. 18. Prayers, Thanksgivings, Lifting up of Holy Hands, a pure Heart, (which is ever accompany'd with clean Hands) a broken Heart, and a contrite Spirit, &c. are sometimes spoken of in Scripture under much the same Notion. Whilst *Heathens* therefore, in their Danger and Distress, vow Altars, or Sacrifi-

ces to this or the other of their insignificant Deities; oh! let us Christians, upon such Occasions, vow a truly Christian Sacrifice. Whilst they *vow* to, as well as worship their helpless Idols, let us vow to the *true and living God, our God and our Saviour, our God and our Redeemer*, to whom the Titles, *Optimus, Maximus*, the *Best and Greatest*, do most justly and truly agree.

There is one Thing in these *Pagan votive Altars*, that may be a Shame and Reproach to a great many who call themselves Christians; and that is the *Willingness and Chearfulness*, with which they paid, or pretended to pay the Vows they had made. Such as have any Acquaintance with these Things, know how commonly these Letters, *V. S. L. M.* or *V. S. L. L. M.* are added at the End of the Inscriptions that are on such Altars; whereby they signify'd how *willingly*
and

and *cheerfully*, as well as *deservedly*, they perform'd the Vow they had made, viz. *Votum solvit Libens Merito*, or *Votum solvit Libens Lubens* (or *Letus*) *Merito*. Much more *deservedly*, and therefore more *willingly* and *cheerfully*, should the Vows made to the most High, to the True and Living God, be paid or perform'd to him, and particularly the *Vows made in Trouble*. But how far is this from being so in fact? How rarely are Vows made in Trouble duly perform'd? And the Reason of this seems to be plainly, because such *Resolutions* and *Vows* proceed only from Fear, and not from a Principle of predominant Love to God and Religion; or from a hasty Transport rather than a deliberate Choice; and so are not sincere, with how much seeming Earnestness soever they appear to be made.

Most Persons have some secret Convictions in their Minds, that God, and he only, is able to relieve, and deliver them when they are in Trouble, and are also perswaded, that Vows of Repentance and Reformation, may be a Means of procuring Deliverance from that God who only is able to work it. Such Convictions put Men upon making Vows to God in their Trouble, since they are prompted by the Principle of Self-preservation implanted in the Minds of all, to desire and endeavour after their own Safety and Ease. But then those Vows and Promises are very often made only with a View to their own Safety and Ease: And, as a great Man expresses it, they are us'd as *Bribes in the Court of Heaven*. But there is no sort of Bribery in that Court, nor any deceiving or imposing upon him who resides and rules there. And yet it is very true, and confirm'd

firm'd by several Places of Scripture, that *Repentance, Vows of Reformation, fervent Supplications and Prayers*, and the like, are powerful Means to prevail with God to prevent any threaten'd Judgments, or remove them when they have been inflicted. This encourages Persons to seek unto God in their Affliction, in hopes that they shall find him, and Mercy with him, for they perswade themselves they are seeking him in a Way and *Time wherein he may be found.*

But it is certain, that such Persons too often have no farther Aims than the obtaining the Deliverance which they need and desire; and therefore when the Distress and Danger is over, which awaken'd their Fear and Concern, all their Vows and Promises are quickly forgotten; and all their seeming Religion is only as the *Morning Cloud and early Dew*, it quickly passeth away. *Self*, and

not *God*, was principally ey'd and design'd in such Vows, and therefore when *Self* is secur'd *God* is quickly forgotten. Their seeming Religion, which was only caus'd by their Fear, ceaseth as soon as the Danger is over. The Effect ceases when the Cause is remov'd. When once these Persons get into the World, and their former Company again, when they return to their former Employments and Pleasures, they return to their former Wickedness too, *with the Dog to his Vomit again, and with the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the Mire.* They are no better, yea, it may be, worse than ever before; and, perhaps, never think or speak of their solemn Vows, unless it be in Scorn and Derision. *Vows in Trouble* rarely proceed from any true *Delight in God and his Ways*; and when there is no *Delight in the Almighty*, such Hypocrites may vow to him, and call upon him in
Trou-

Trouble, but they will not ALWAYS call upon God. They are still at the bottom *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God.* Only it may be, when they apprehend that they can enjoy the Pleasure of Sin and this World no longer, they would gladly be happy in the other, or escape those future Punishments which they are convinc'd their Sins do justly deserve. Their Hearts are not really chang'd and renew'd; their Consent to God and Religion is not fix'd and determin'd, nor is what seems to be their Temper upon this Occasion, the habitual, settled Frame and Temper of their Minds. And it is certain, that whatever Vows and Promises any may make, without a Principle of true Grace, and prevailing Love to God and Religion, *all is but as the sounding Brass and the tinkling Cymbal*, which may make a Noise for a little while, but is not like to be lasting.

I have sometimes thought, that some such familiar Supposition as is here added, may serve to confirm and illustrate this Matter. Let us suppose any one to be in extreme Danger, or the utmost Distress, and at that very instant to see one whom he knew could relieve him, but one whom before he bore a mortal Enmity to. There is no great doubt in this Case, but a Man would earnestly cry to his Enemy for Relief and Assistance, tho' there be as little doubt that this proceeds not from any Love or respect to the other Person, but from the Man's own present Necessity, and passionate Concern for his Safety, under which lies cover'd or buried, for the present, all former Resentment or Hatred: 'Tis true indeed, if an Enemy is so generous as to interpose in this Case, it may, where it meets with a grateful Temper, lay the Foundation of a hearty, lasting Friendship. But if the

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Person reliev'd be of a different Temper, the Hatred and Malice will, 'tis likely, revive, when the Distress or Danger is over.

Just so it is as to Vows and Promises made in Distress, Danger, and Trouble, generally speaking it is Self-love more than any Love to God or his Ways, that produces them; and therefore (as I have said) when Self is secur'd God is forgotten, and Corruption being only as it were asleep, and latent for a while, not slain or subdu'd, does quickly appear and awaken, as soon as Ease and Health, or Safety return: Unless the Grace and Spirit of God do that in this Case, which a grateful Temper does in the other, that is, lay hold on this Occasion, and work powerfully by it, in order to bring about a happy and lasting Reconciliation between God and the Soul: But where the Grace and Spirit of God do not efficaciously concur and co-operate, the Enmity
to

to God and his Law that's fix'd and rooted in their Hearts, will not be long in shewing it self again in its usual Fruits.

To the same Causes, though in a lower degree, is it owing, that even serious Persons are often too negligent and dilatory in performing the Vows they made in their Trouble, for Sin and Corruption remain in all, even in those in whom it has lost its absolute Sway or predominant Power. They have, at least, the Remains of like Passions with others, and stand expos'd to the like Temptations with them.

Thus I have hinted at the Springs from whence the Frequency of Vows in Trouble may be suppos'd to arise: I have also shewn the Causes why the faithful Performance of such Vows does so rarely appear. Happy indeed! if the punctual Payment of such Vows run parallel, or
was

was equal to the Frequency of them. But, alas ! there are many who make, and but few who perform them. I shall transcribe the following Passage from a very good Author. *I believe I should keep within the Compass, if I should say, that scarce one of an Hundred of those who come under Vows to God in Trouble and Distress, take care with any Faithfulness to pay them afterwards. An eminent Divine, now with God, who had with great Faithfulness for the Course of many Years exercis'd his Ministry in this City **, being asked by a Friend, what Number of the many he had known to be in great Agony and Sicknes, and under the Apprehensions of Death's Approach, who then profess'd Repentance of their past wicked Lives, and promis'd and vow'd a serious and holy Life afterwards, to which they had before been Strangers; what Number of such he had known,


* London.

known, that in a Judgment of Charity he could apprehend were truly chang'd by their Sickness, and faithful in paying their Vows when recover'd: He answer'd, That he could not say, that in the whole Course of his Ministry he had met with above Three of that Number.



C H A P. IV.

Some Reflections upon the preceding Part of this Discourse, or some general Inferences from it.

First,  **O**UR Belief of the Being and Providence of God, and of a future World, may receive no small Confirmation and Establishment from what has gone before, and from that which has been one principal Occasion of this Discourse, I mean, the great Frequency

quency of the Practice of making such Vows in Times of Danger and Trouble: For if these great Matters were only imaginary, from whence proceed those irresistible Impressions thereof upon the Minds of Men, even of those whose Inclination and Interest should lead them most to deny their Reality? Surely God has not *left himself without a Witness* in every Man's Breast: And though this Witness may be brib'd for a Time, and its Mouth may be stopp'd, yet upon other Occasions *it will cry aloud and not spare*— How few are there that die unconvinc'd of the Reality of a future World, and unconcern'd about their State and Condition in it? And to what is this to be ascrib'd, but to the strong Impressions of the great Truths relating to a future State that are upon the Minds of all, and to the clear Evidences of these Truths; when closely and impartially view'd and consider'd? The Impressions of a Deity,

his Power and Providence, appear from their Vows being *made to him*; for to what purpose should they do this, if they believe not his Being, Perfections and Providence? They that *come to him*, and they that *vow to him*, must surely be convinc'd *that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. Why do they make their Recourse to him? or, Why do they desire or hope for Deliverance from him, if they be not convinc'd of the Reality and Truth of his Providence? or, Why is Reformation of Life, or Duty to God and Man, the usual Matter of their Vows, if they were not convinc'd of the Reality of a future World, the Necessity of making suitable Preparation for it, and the great Danger of leaving this World before they are meet for a Better? What other Meaning has this their usual Language?

“ Were I prepared to die, I should not
 “ be afraid or unwilling; but, alas! such
 “ has

“ has been my Life and Behaviour, that
“ I dare not look my Judge in the Face ;
“ had I any Hopes of being approv'd or
“ acquitted at the great and awful Day;
“ or were I meet to be Partaker of the
“ Inheritance of the Saints in Light, I
“ could then bid a chearful Adieu to this
“ World of Darkneſs and Sorrow, but
“ I have no ſuch Hopes, nor any ground
“ for them. But, oh! if God will ſpare
“ me *yet a little, that I may recover*
“ *Strength before I go hence and be no*
“ *more,* I reſolve, I promiſe, I vow, to
“ turn over a new Leaf, and to be and
“ do better than heretofore I have been
“ and done ——” I ſay, does not ſuch
Language as this ſpeak ſtrongly and
clearly their lively Convictions of the
Certainty of a future State? And does
not their Judgment at this Time deſerve
the greateſt Regard, when their Minds
are not clouded, biaſs'd or brib'd with
the Proſpect of Pleaſure, Profit or Ho-

nour, nor lost in the Enjoyment thereof? Is not the greatest Credit now due to their Testimony? When they were drown'd in Sensuality and Pleasure, and their Minds corrupted and prejudic'd; when their keen Pursuit of this World render'd them altogether unattentive and inconsiderate with respect to another; then, methinks, what they either thought or said about this Matter was less to be heeded. But under the Circumstances I now refer to, there's less room to suspect their Judgment or the Truth of their Testimony. The World they give their Judgment about, or bear their Testimony to, is brought nearer to their View, and a more impartial, as well as a more extensive View may be justly expected. Must not Men be the most capable of discovering another World, and discerning the Reality of it; must they not have the clearest and fullest Prospect of it, when they stand upon the very Borders thereof?

of? And when their Sight is no more clouded, their Eyes not blinded or weakened by the dazzling Appearances of the Beauties of this World, and by their own looking too intently upon them.

When they look upon a future World as at a very great Distance, and put it much farther from them in their Imagination, than it is in Reality, they are then unmov'd by the Prospect, or doubtful about the very Being of it. But when it is brought near to their View, and the Necessity of making due Preparation for it, and their own Want of this bro't home to their Consciences; then it is that they cry out, "*What have I done? What shall I do?*" I have heretofore shut my Eyes against that World, which now presents it self full and clear to my View; I have been deaf to all Warnings, Exhortations and Entreaties, to prepare for it; but now my Ears and

" my Eyes are open'd together — And
 " *what shall I now do to be saved?* "

The Prophane and the Atheistical oft come to this at last, and are oblig'd to give their Testimony concerning the Reality of that World which before they disbeliev'd and disregarded, or was, perhaps, only the Matter of their Contempt and Derision, and those Impressions of a Deity, or of a Being of infinite Perfections, that were smother'd or stifled before, amidst a Multitude of sensual Delights and Pleasures, now revive and shew themselves clearly, when the Pleasures of Sin and the World seem to be near to an End — The Earl of *Rochester* was a famous and well known Instance of this. — See his Life by Dr. *Burnet*, and the Doctor's Testimony concerning the Truth of it in his late History. The same Affliction that shook his Constitution, and threaten'd the Dissolution of it, shook also his atheistical

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Perfwasion and Principles, in which he seem'd to have been so much, and so long establish'd, and to all Appearance caus'd the total and utter Abolition of them — Whilst free from Trouble, free from Restraint, he indulg'd himself in all Manner of Liberty and Vice, *God was not in all his Thoughts*; his Being and Providence seem to have been no part of his Creed — But when he was in Trouble and Danger of Death, then he was very ready to acknowledge, *That verily there is a Reward for the Righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth in the Earth*, Psal. lviii. ult. *From him must my Salvation come, for Power and Mercy belong to him*, Psal. lxii. 11, 12.

I know some have been so far abandon'd, as to glory in their Infidelity, and to seem to carry on their prophane Triumph, their daring, impious Insults, upon God and his Providence, to their
last

last Minutes ——— But such Instances are very rare, and I make no doubt, but that how much soever they have hardened themselves, or how hardy soever they are vain of appearing, yet their Hearts do often misgive them.

And I believe, if strict Enquiry be made, it will be found, that the greater part of those who arrive to this Height, are such as have sometimes been under the Awe of Religion, under strong Convictions; or, in a Word, such as have often made Vows in Danger and Trouble, but never perform'd them, and now are asham'd or afraid to make any more.

I know one, who having been two or three Times under strong Impressions of Religion, and to all Appearance very sober and promising, suffer'd himself, however, to be jeer'd or banter'd out of all. After this he seem'd industriously to banish

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all Thoughts about Religion out of his Mind, and sustain'd some dangerous threatening Shocks of Sicknefs, without expressing any Concern about another World; though usually, as sensible Objects strike the Senses more strongly when near, so does a future World the Mind. But none are so much hardened in Irreligion and Infidelity, as those who have often play'd fast and loose with the Almighty, and thereby *hardened themselves against him.*

Secondly, From what has been said we may be inform'd of the Usefulness of Afflictions and Troubles. They often rouse and awaken stupid, sleepy Souls, and stir them up to some serious Thoughts about a future World, and a future Judgment. They are often sent by God on this very Errand; and few are so hardened and obstinate, as not to be in some Measure touch'd and affected in the *Hour of*

of their Trouble. In Adversity Men begin to consider. Afflictions awaken and fix the Thoughts and Attention, and often bring those Persons to the Thoughts and Remembrance of God, who had all along forgot him, and not had him in all their Thoughts before: So that they now seek him early perhaps, who never knew before what it was to seek him at all — In this Sense and Respect their Reins instruct them in the Night Seasons, Psal. xvi. 7.

Prosperity and Pleasure often distract the Mind, and set Men beside themselves, whilst Afflictions and Troubles bring them to themselves, and to their Senses again. When Men are set on high, their Heads are too apt to turn giddy, and in their exalted State they forget their God and themselves. But when they are brought down and set low, they become somewhat more reasonable and thoughtful,

ful, and direct and aim their Thoughts
higher, when they themselves are plac'd
lower.

'Tis true, some obstinate Wretches are
sometimes only driven by their Afflictions
into a greater Excess, and by their
desperate Wickedness and Blasphemies
begin their Hell upon Earth. We have
some such melancholy Instances, some
few such sad and woful Examples as
these. But this is a Case that does not
often occur; nor are many such desperate
Wretches found out of Hell.

For (as I have shewn in the foregoing
Chapter) Distress, Danger and Trouble,
generally put People upon laying themselves
under stronger Ties and Obligations to be
the Servants of the most High, and to serve
him in a better Manner. And such Vows and
Resolutions may be of use: And though too
often, alas! neglected

lected by those who have made them; (as I have also shewn before) yet sometimes they leave a lasting Impression behind them, and are never forgot by some, whilst the Life that was restor'd is continued to them. Now, where this is the Case, they have good Reason to join with the Psalmist, and say, *It was good for me that I was afflicted.* How many have had Reason to bless God all their Life time for such and such an Affliction?

It has oft been observ'd, that even Persecution it self has done good to Religion, which has prosper'd and spread it self even under this Pressure, especially as to the *Life* and *Power* of it. How true is it, that in the Time of the Churches Troubles, there was *more Religion*, though *fewer Professors*? We are apt to say, when we think or read of the Sufferings of the righteous Servants of God,

God, that these were *melancholy Times indeed* ! But may we not justly say, that the present Times are more melancholy than these were ? As much more melancholy as it is to see Religion it self suffer, than to see others suffer, or be our selves the Sufferers *for it*.

If then Afflictions, and even Persecution it self, be of so much Service to Religion, and such real Use to them who profess it, then this should make us more easy and patient under any such Troubles. And, indeed, it is our Interest, as well as our Duty, to be patient in Tribulation. When we are *in the Depths*, we by struggling only plunge our selves so much the deeper.

Thirdly, We may take Occasion from hence to observe, how little a splendid Profession, fair Words or big Promises, will avail or signify where there are no

answerable Performances. A *beautiful Lamp* is of little Use, if it be unfurnish'd *with Oil*. God will not regard your Promise, but your Performance. Your *promising* to serve God, and your *professing to know him*, is all to no purpose, if you still continue *in your Works to deny him*. The *Tree is known by its Fruits*. The *Heart* can never be *pure*, where the *Hands* are not *clean*. I know some pretend that their Hearts are good, though their Lives and Conversations be bad; but this is absurd in it self, and inconsistent with the express Declarations of the Scripture to the contrary.

Nor does true Religion consist in hasty Fits or Flashes, but is of a more constant, abiding Nature: The Seed of true Grace abides in the Heart in which it is once sown.

'Tis sometimes, indeed, hard to distinguish between those Resolutions and Promises that are truly sincere, and those that are not ; or between a hasty Flash, and a real Change of Heart. But, however, the Difference is easily known by the Fruits and Effects, where there is Time and Opportunity for it. A real Change of Heart is follow'd by a real and visible Change of Life, when Life is continu'd ; for a good Heart and a bad Life (as I have just now said) are by no Means consistent the one with the other, whatever some may vainly pretend. And when the Change within is not real and true, no wonder if the Fruits and Effects, which appear without, be not lasting nor uniform.

If Vows and Promises, even when made with much seeming Earnestness, were true Religion, few dying Persons

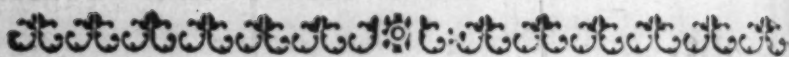
but would be truly Religious. But, alas! the contradictory Lives and Actions of many, who survive their Danger or Illness, do plainly demonstrate how little these are to be depended on.

I am not willing to carry this Matter to so great a Length as some others have done, or to assert the Impossibility of a Death-bed Repentance; that is, such as is sincere, and will be saving. I see no Grounds, either from Scripture, or the Nature of the Thing, thus to limit the Grace of God, as if it could not, even upon a Death-bed, truly and thoroughly sanctify a Soul, and make it fit for Heaven, when there may be no Room nor Opportunity upon Earth for bringing forth the genuine Fruits of such a Sanctification. An unfruitful Tree may by proper Methods be made really good, and such as would bring forth good Fruit at the proper Season, and yet

yet be cut down before that Season come.

But, however, though a Death-bed Repentance may sometimes be sincere; yet all agree, that this is very rare. The best way is in Time of Health, and seeming Safety, to *bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance*, and thereby to make it appear, that you have more Religion than what consists only in large Professions and Promises, flowing from your Fear and Apprehensions of Danger.





C H A P. V.

An earnest Exhortation to the faithful Performance of Vows made in Trouble, enforced by proper Arguments or Motives.

READER, if thou in any Trouble hast made any Vows and Promises to God, I would now, in his Name, call upon thee to pay them unto him. Oh! join with the Psalmist and say, *I will pay thee my Vows which my Lips have utter'd, and my Mouth hath spoken when I was in Trouble.* Has God been gracious to thee in thy Danger and Trouble, and canst thou be unmindful of him, so ungrateful to him, as not to pay what thou didst vow and promise to him?

We many Times, indeed, hear great Promises made in a Time of Trouble, but may we not well say to such Persons, in such Cases, as God did to the People of *Israel*, *Deut. v. 29. O that there was a Heart in you to perform them!* O that all your Promises were follow'd with punctual and speedy Performances! *Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God, Psal. lxxvi. 11. Pay thy Vows unto the most High, Psal. l. 14.*

Though we have too many Instances of Failure, and Breach of Promise, yet on the other Hand, we have some Examples of a faithful Performance; as in the *Psalmist*, and *Jonah*, &c. and these are worthy of our Imitation, *Psal. xxii. 25. and Psal. cxvi. and Jonah ii. 9, &c.*

And I have known some later Instances too, of Persons eminent in Religion and Usefulness, who being first awa-ken'd by Danger or Trouble, to some solemn Engagements, did, through divine Grace, stick to these Engagements through the whole Course of their Lives. That thou, Reader, mayst imitate these Examples; consider,

First, That it is *God* you have vow'd and promis'd to, and it is every way fit and reasonable, that *unto him the Vow should be perform'd*, Psal. lxxv. 1. That Exhortation in the fiftieth *Psalms* 14th. *Pay thy Vows unto the MOST HIGH*, seems to have a very strong Argument couch'd up in it; It is the *most high God* you have vow'd unto, and therefore must not go back. So *Jephthah* argues — *I have open'd my Mouth UNTO THE LORD, and I cannot go back*, Judges

xi. 35. The Vow is not made to a deaf and blind Idol, that could neither *hear* your Vow, nor *see* your Performance; but to the true and living God, an omniscient, and an omnipotent Being. And will you then presume to violate this your Engagement *to him*? See the Readiness with which the poor blinded Idolators paid the Vows they made to their poor helpless Idols, and be thereby sham'd into a faithful Performance of yours to the *true God*, and the *most High*. I have hinted before at their usual Declaration upon their *votive Altars*, that they *paid their Vow deservedly, willingly, and* chearfully. *Libens, Lubens, Merito* — And we read of some in the Scripture, who were very ready and keen to perform their idolatrous Vows to the Queen of Heaven, *Jer. xliv. 25.* — *We will surely perform our Vows that we have vow'd, to burn Incense to the Queen of Heaven,* —

How

How great a Shame then and Reproach must it be to you, if you are not more firmly determined to pay your Vows to the *true King of Heaven*, the *Lord of Hosts*? There is a dreadful Threatning against those, who were so much bent upon paying their Vows to the Queen of Heaven, *viz. That God would watch over them for Evil and not for Good*, Ver. 27. But if you pay your Vows to the true God, you may be encourag'd to hope, that he'll watch over you *only for Good*. If you neglect to perform your Vows, you may then have just Reason to be afraid of meeting with the same Judgment here threaten'd to be inflicted upon these idolatrous Persons, since you deserve it as highly as they.

Again, consider how the Case stands, when Vows and Promises are made to Men, our Fellow Creatures, how odious are those, when not attended or accompanied

panied with proper Performances? How much, and how deservedly, are those deceitful, treacherous Persons, despis'd and hated by all, who speak fair to every Body, but do good to none? or, Who are very free and liberal in their Promises, but very sparing in their Performance? But how much, yea, how infinitely worse must it be, when Men deal thus with God, their Creator? How much more hateful and vile in it self, and how much more dangerous to those who are chargeable with it?

How much more hateful and vile must it be to deal treacherously, and perfidiously with God, our kindest Benefactor, our great Creator, and great Deliverer, than to deal so with our fellow Creatures? It is to add the greatest Ingratitude to the greatest Falshood, and so to make it a Complication of the blackest Crimes. And how base is it to prove unfaithful to
that

that God who never was, nor can be unfaithful to any? If all Men be *Liars*, God will be *faithful and true*, Rom. iii. 4. Men may *deal falsely in his Covenant*, Psal. xlv. 7. But God cannot, will not, deal falsely with any. He will not *suffer his Faithfulness to fail*, Psal. lxxxix. 33. If he even corrects his Children, or *afflicts* his Servants, it is in *Faithfulness to them*, Psal. cxix. 75. And will you then prove False to that God, who himself is eternally and unchangeably Faithful and True?

Besides, it must be unspeakably more dangerous to deal falsely with your Creator, than to deal so with any of your Fellow Creatures. We may deal perfidiously with Men at a much easier Rate than we can do with God: For they may not discern our Deceit, or not be able to avenge it. But God knows all our deceitful Dealings with him, and can easily take

take Vengeance on those that are guilty. We can no more get beyond the Reach of his Arm, than we can get out of the Reach of his Eye. As God cannot be deceiv'd, and will not be mocked, so he will sooner or later reckon in a terrible Manner with all those who deal perfidiously with him, that is, with all those who have vow'd and promis'd, but never perform'd.

If then, Reader, thou hast made any Vows to God in thy Danger or Trouble, and now art beginning to waver; endeavour to fix thy Resolutions by expostulating with thy self, after some such Manner as this. “Remember, O my
 “Soul, that the *Vows of God* are upon
 “thee; in my late Distress and Trouble
 “I came under Engagements to the *most*
 “*High, I open'd my Mouth to the Lord,*
 “and how then can I, how dare I
 “go back? O, my Soul, thou hast
 H “(up-

“ (upon that Occasion) *said unto the*
“ *Lord, thou art my Lord, (Psal. xvi. 2.)*
“ And now when enlarg’d, and set at li-
“ berty, shall I forget my great Deli-
“ verer, and neglect all my Vows and
“ Promises to him? Would I not blush
“ to deal thus with my Friend or my
“ Neighbour, and can I deal thus with
“ my Creator without Shame and Re-
“ morse? *If I forget him, and deal*
“ *falsly in his Covenant; if my Heart be*
“ *now turned back from him, and my*
“ *Steps decline from his Way, shall not*
“ *God search it out?* And how then
“ shall I be able at another Day to look
“ my Judge in the Face? What Con-
“ fusion and Horror must then sieze upon
“ me, when I shall see the Books open’d,
“ wherein all my black Ingratitude and
“ Treachery stand upon Record against
“ me, and the Almighty arm’d with
“ Vengeance against me for it? O ! whi-
“ ther shall I then *flee from his Presence?*

“ In

“ In vain shall I *say to the Mountains*
 “ *and Rocks, fall upon me, and hide me*
 “ *from the Face of him that sitteth on the*
 “ *Throne*, Rev. vi. 16. For if they
 “ should, at my Cry, fall upon me, they
 “ could neither hide my Crime from
 “ God, nor secure me from his Venge-
 “ *ance, When therefore this great Day*
 “ *of his Wrath is come, how shall I be*
 “ *able to stand?* Ver. 17.

Secondly, Consider, that not to pay what you vow'd in your Trouble, is the way to have your Trouble (both inward and outward) renewed and aggravated, unless God, in a way of Judgment, suffer you to be easy; and this is unspeakably worse. Your perfidious Dealing with God is so highly provoking to him, that you may justly expect to be involv'd in the like or greater Trouble again. And will it not add a heavy Load to your Trouble, to remember the

Vows and Promises you made in your former Afflictions, and how grossly or entirely you fail'd in the Performance of them? What a Damp will this strike into your Mind? And how much must it discourage you, either from making any further Application to God for Relief, or expecting any Deliverance from him?

Remember that it is no unusual Thing for God to inflict, even some remarkable Judgments, on perfidious Persons, or deceitful Apostates; even though, perhaps, he had not long before vouchsaf'd some remarkable Deliverances to them. *Jude 5. The Lord having saved the People out of the Land of Egypt, afterwards destroy'd them who believed not* ——— And if God should *rise up*, and thus *visit you*, what would you do? What could you *answer him*? Must you not be constrain'd to acknowledge, That he is *justify'd when he speaketh, and clear when he*

he judgeth, Psal. li. 4. Even though he *speaketh hard Things*, and pronounceth a severe Sentence against you, all is *less than your Iniquity and Treachery deserve.*

If after that you have list'd your selves under Christ's Banner, and solemnly vow'd and engag'd to follow him as the Captain of your Salvation, you basely desert and run away from him, how just is it for God to shoot his Arrows even *against you*? And how terrible must those Arrows be, that are shot by an almighty Arm, and I may say, dipp'd in Poison too? How dreadful, indeed, must their Case be, in whom those *Arrows stick fast*, Psal. xxxviii. without any hopes of Ease or Relief? That almighty Arm alone which shot them can pluck them out; but you'll then have no Reason to expect that it should. You are much more likely then to have Occasion to say,

The Poison of the Arrows of the Almighty drinketh up my Spirits. The Terrors of God do set themselves in array against me, Job vi. 4.

If Danger of immediate Death was (as it usually is) the Case in which you made your Vows and Promises to God, you'll do well to consider, that the Time will quickly come again, when you'll not only fear or apprehend your selves to be dying, but really shall be so. And what Comfort can you then hope for, if you basely violate all the solemn Vows and Ties you are under?

Oh! pay the Vows you made under past Troubles, if you would have Support and Comfort under those that are to come; and especially, if you would have Comfort when you lie on a Death-bed.

Were

Were you not abundantly convinc'd under your last Apprehensions of approaching Death and Eternity, that there was no Comfort to be had but what came from the Favour of God? And did you not then see just Reason to wish, that you had been more faithful to him? And will you then yet again be perfidious to him? Disregarding that awful Declaration, — *If any Man draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him,* Heb. x. 38. *i. e.* must conceive the greatest Indignation and Displeasure against him.

This leads me to the next Consideration, which has some Affinity with what I have just been discoursing. Therefore,

Thirdly, Consider, that the best Preparation for after Troubles, is the faithful

ful Performance of the solemn Vows and Promises that were made under those that are past. And this especially is the best way to prepare for a Death-bed; this is the way, under any future Troubles, to have the *Testimony of your Consciences*, which is the only ground of *Rejoicing*, and which will enable you to rejoice in Tribulation. Oh! happy they, indeed, even in the midst of all their Afflictions, who are conscious to themselves of having walk'd *in simplicity and godly Sincerity, not by fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God*. Blessed are they, indeed, who agreeably to, and in pursuance of, the solemn Vows and Promises they made in past Troubles, can in their next Afflictions address themselves to God, as good *Hezekiah*, and say, *Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walk'd before thee in Truth, and with a perfect Heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight*, Isa.

xxxviii. 3. Then may they in their Troubles *remember God* (Psal. xlv. 2.) with Satisfaction and Pleasure, and when *greatly distress'd encourage themselves in him*, even in him who is the *Father of Mercies, and the God of all Comfort*. But if you have basely violated, and perfidiously broke through all the solemn Obligations you, in your last Troubles, had laid your selves under; Oh! what Horror must seize and possess your Souls, when you find your selves involv'd in the like Troubles again! You may then, indeed, *Remember God and be troubled*, as beholding his Power and Justice arm'd against you; and now, perhaps, expecting to be quickly call'd by him to an awful Account, for all your rude Affronts offer'd to him, and for all your treacherous Dealings with him.

And to whom will you then cry for Relief? That God who alone can save you,

you, will not hear you: He is, indeed, a God *bearing Prayer*, but *he bears not Sinners*. The Prayers of such wicked, deceitful, treacherous Persons as you, must be *an Abomination to him*. Yea, with what Face can you go to God, under new Troubles, when you have acted such a Part after your Deliverance out of your former? or, What can you expect but a severe Repulse and Denial from God? Mayn't he justly say to you, "In
 " your last Troubles you called upon me,
 " and I answer'd you; you cried to me
 " for Deliverance, and I wrought it for
 " you; you, before the Deliverance, so-
 " lemnly vow'd and promis'd to do great
 " Things for my Honour, but after it,
 " quickly forgot both me and all the
 " Vows you had made. Now then,
 " when *Distress and Anguish* are come
 " upon you again, go where, and to
 " whom you will, for *though you should*
 " *call upon me, I will not answer; tho'*
 " you

*"you should seek me early, you shall not
"find me.*

Present Paiment of Vows is the way to obtain future Deliverances. The Connexion is remarkable in *Psal. l. 14, 15.* *Pay thy Vows unto the most high God, and call upon me in the Day of Trouble, I will deliver thee —* On the other hand, Apostacy, or the gross Violation of your former solemn Vows and Engagements, is the most likely way both to bring new Troubles upon you, and to be utterly abandon'd and forsaken by God when you are in them.

Or if the Breach and Violation should not be total, but the Failures very great, whilst somewhat of Truth and true Religion do still remain at the bottom: Yet how will the Conscioufness of these damp and discourage even the serious Soul in its after Applications to God under the
like

like pressing Necessities ? If they be truly serious in the main, yet how will this cloud and obscure their Evidences, and fill their Souls with Darkneſs, Doubts and Fears ? Well then remember, that a Time of Trouble will come again ; this you may certainly reckon upon. And if in your next Distreſs and Trouble you would have the Comfort you wanted, or more than you had in your laſt, *O ! pay the Vows to God which your Mouths have ſpoken, and your Lips have utter'd when you were in Trouble.*

Fourthly, Conſider, if you perform not theſe ſolemn Vows and Promiſes, you had better never have made them. So ſays *Solomon* expreſly, *Eccleſ. v. 5. Better it is that thou ſhouldeſt not vow, than that thou ſhouldeſt vow and not pay.* For if the Thing be indifferent in it ſelf, then not to vow was no Sin, though it be a great one to break the Vow when
2 made.

made. And if the Thing vow'd be what, previous to the Vow, was really necessary; yet by making the Vow we add to the Obligation, and therefore encrease our Guilt, if afterwards we neglect it. And the whole Obligation continues in full force, whatever our Temper and Carriage be. Whether we faithfully perform, or basely neglect our Vows, our Obligations to a faithful Performance continue the same, and we are accordingly answerable for every Neglect and Violation of them. We can't *break these Bands asunder*, nor *cast away these Cords from us*, though we should *cast off* all Sense of them, and all Care and Concern about them.

But besides the additional Guilt arising from your Unfaithfulness, and abstracting too from the greater temporal Evils which you have Reason to apprehend from such ungrateful Returns, your spiritual

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ritual Condition will, upon other Accounts, be render'd so much the worse. You'll be more harden'd in Sin, and there will be far less hopes of your after Repentance, or of any future Amendments. The more, and the oftner, your Heart has been melted and softned, if you suffer it to harden again, 'twill grow so much harder than ever. And that which has been *twice dead* is so much the less likely to revive or recover. There is nothing that has a more direct Tendency to draw down upon our Souls that dreadfullest of Judgments, *a judicial Hardness of Heart*, than such Unfaithfulness and Treachery as this. Oh! be afraid of so tremendous a Judgment as this, and shew that you are so, by paying *faithfully* what you have vow'd so *solemnly* to the most High.

Fifthly, Consider (what I have hinted at before) that to neglect, or break through

through such Vows as you have come under, is to add the greatest Ingratitude to the vilest Treachery, which must make up a complicated Crime of the blackest Nature. *Ingratum dixeris & omnia dixeris.* Call a Man ungrateful and you call him all that's bad. And what greater Ingratitude can there be, than to prove so unfaithful to one, who has been so mindful of you, and so gracious to you? Can a perfidious Violation of your solemn Vows to God, be a proper or suitable Return to him, for the great Deliverance he has wrought for you? *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish People and unwise!* Has he not done great Things for you? And will you after all your great Promises do nothing for him? *Hear O Heavens! and give Ear O Earth! and be astonish'd* at this horrid Ingratitude! (*Isa. i. 2. and Jer. ii. 12.*) How unlike is this to the Temper and Conduct of the People of God, as is de-

scrib'd *Psal.* xliv. 17, 18. " *All this is*
 " *come upon us, yet have we not forgot-*
 " *ten thee, neither have we dealt falsely*
 " *in thy Covenant — Our Heart is not*
 " *turned back, neither have our Steps*
 " *declin'd from thy way — though*
 " *thou hast sore broken us, &c.*" God
 had involv'd them in Distress and Trouble,
 and had chang'd their Prosperity into
 Adversity: Instead of Victory, and
 their wonted Success, they now only
 met with shameful and great Disappoint-
 ments — Yet amidst all those Trials,
 even under such a Change as this, they
 remain'd constant and true to God and
 his Covenant. O ! how should this
 Temper and Conduct shame and reprove
 these ungrateful, perfidious Persons, who
 act so much the reverse, who, when
 God has chang'd their State so much for
 the better, according to their own earnest
 Request and Desire, prove unfaithful to
 God, and their most solemn Vows and
 Cove-

Covenant with him! All that Trouble came upon the People of God of old, and yet they dealt not *falsly in the Covenant*. But you, when such signal Deliverances from Distress and Trouble have been vouchsaf'd unto you, when all this *Mercy is come upon you*, yet you prove false and unfaithful.

Sixthly, Consider, your Failure in the Performance of your Vows will betray your Hypocrisy, and shew, that how earnest soever you seem'd to be when you made them, yet you were not truly sincere. For an actual Performance (when there is an Opportunity) is the only sufficient Evidence of a prevailing Sincerity. The Truth and Goodness of the Tree is known by its Fruits. Who will ever believe that Man to have been sincere in his Promises, that fails utterly in his Performance of them, even when and where there is Opportunity of ma-

king them good? And what is it that makes the Sincerity of Death-bed Vows and Promises so much (and, alas! so justly) suspected, but the frequent and general Failure of those whom God is pleas'd to restore or recover from *such Pains* as they took to be the *Pains of Death*, or such Illness as they fully believ'd was the *Forerunner of the Grave*? And will you then, by acting the same Part, contribute to the Encrease of the Suspicion or Jealousy? Should you yourselves repeat your Vows and Engagements, when God renews your Danger and Troubles, how much Reason do you hereby give both to others and yourselves to suspect your Sincerity? Will not your Conscience fly in your Face, and how can you avoid saying, "I vow'd before upon a like Occasion with much seeming Solemnity and Earnestness, but I afterwards discover'd my Insincerity, by my gross Neglect, and

“ Un-

“ Unconcernedness about my Perfor-
“ mance of the Vows I had made, and
“ how can I now expect that either God
“ or Man will regard what I say? How
“ can others, or how can even I my self
“ believe my self to be sincere?

“Tis true, there may be Failures, too great Failures, even in those who continue in the main to be sincere. But, even in this Case, such Failures must needs create a great many Doubts and Fears, perplex and discourage the Soul, and give the Persons just Occasion to question their Sincerity, and the Truth of their Grace. If therefore you would keep all Matters easy and clear between God and your Souls, let me advise and entreat you to be very punctual and faithful in the Payment of your Vows to the most High. Any Neglects or Failures in this respect, though not gross enough to argue the Want of all Religion

on, may yet be sufficient to make you *walk heavily, and in Darkness* all your Life, and even to *go down to the Grave with Sorrow.*

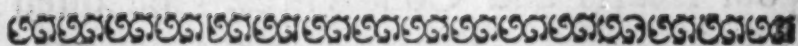
Seventhly, Consider, how great a Discredit and Disservice you do to Religion, when you forget all your solemn Vows you made in your Troubles, and throw all these Engagements behind your backs. How do you hereby provide for the Triumph of the Atheist or the Infidel, and prepare the way for their impious Insults upon God and Religion? How readily, perhaps, will such ill-disposed Persons (against all Reason and Justice) infer from your single Instance, that all Religion is only the Effect of Fancy or Fear? For, say they, when the Imagination is settled, and their Fear is removed, we see, we hear no more of Religion; thus Religion is evil spoken or thought of through you. By reason of
this

this pernicious Practice, the way of Truth, the good, old, and true way of Religion, is evil spoken of, 2 Pet. ii. 2. This is to lay a stumbling Block in the way of others, and to give Offence in the very worst Sense; and, wo indeed be to them by whom such Offences do come! Wo be to thee, O Reader, if thou art justly chargeable with it!

Eighthly, Consider, how much it is your Interest, as well as Duty, faithfully to pay the Vows you have made. For what have you vow'd to be or do, but what tends to your Happiness, or wherein your true Felicity does altogether, or in a great Measure consist? And can you be too fast bound to your own Happiness? Or would you so much as desire to be releas'd from such Obligations? Why should you desire or endeavour to break these Bands asunder, or cast these Cords from you, which only tie you close to

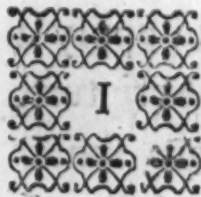
to your God and to your Happiness? Are not they, and they only, Blessed, who have the Lord for their God and their Portion? Happy are they that are in such a Condition; yea, Blessed *are they whose God is the Lord!* And what was the Sum and Substance of all your Vows and Engagements? Was it not to avouch the Lord for your God? Oh! be more concern'd for Grace and Strength to perform these Obligations, than desirous of being releas'd from them. For your Interest and Happiness is in the Performance, your Ruin and Misery in the Release.

Consider and weigh these, and such other Arguments as may be offer'd to enforce the Performance of this Duty, *The Payment of your Vows to God.* Be disposed and ready to receive such Motives, and suitable Impressions from them.



C H A P. VI.

*Containing some Directions concerning
the best Method of performing these
Vows, and the best Helps to such
a Performance.*



Am now come to the last
Thing which I propos'd in
my Method, and that I shall
dispatch in a very small Com-
pass.

Direct. I. Often reflect upon your past
Troubles, the Vows you then made, and
the Frame and Temper you were in when
you made them; thus labour to keep a
constant, lively Sense of these Things
upon your Minds. Whether you see fit
to record these Things in Writing, or no,
at least write and record them deep upon
your

your Hearts and Consciences. Be often thinking, remembring, and saying, *Thy Vows are upon me, O God*, Psal. lvi. 12.

And let every Occurrence that has in it self any Aptness or Tendency to revive the Memory of these Vows, and the Sense of the Obligation resulting from them, be carefully improv'd, and apply'd to this Purpose. We find in Scripture, that even inanimate Creatures are sometimes figuratively call'd upon as Witnesses in such Cases as these: However, they may certainly be us'd as Memorials or Remembrancers to us; we may well say upon such Occasions, "In this Room, "or on this Bed (which I then believ'd "would be my Death-bed) or in this "and the other Circumstance, I made "my solemn Vows to God, and how "then can I look at them, without having such like Impressions very sensibly

“ bly awaken’d again and reviv’d ? ” It is observ’d and suppos’d, that *Jacob* delay’d the Performance of the solemn Vow he had made in *Gen. xxviii.* till another Occurrence rous’d and excited him to the Payment thereof, *viz.* his Call to go up to *Bethel*, the Place where he had made the Vow. The mention of this refresh’d his Memory, and renew’d his Resolution and Zeal, *Gen. xxxv. 1.* *Then Jacob said, Let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an Altar unto God, who answer’d me in the Day of my Distress, and was with me in the way which I went, Ver. 3.*

At least our Friends, Relations and Acquaintances, may be useful this way, if they would be faithful Monitors to us; and we should make it our Request to them, that they would be so. Or any good Book adapted to the Occasion, may be of Service, and help to kindle up a

fresh the dying Flame. Reader, may this thou now hast in thy Hand serve for this purpose !

Direct. II. Endeavour to arm your selves well against the 'Temptations you may be sure of meeting with from the World. Particularly resolve, through Grace, not to be jeer'd or banter'd out of all Sense of Religion by your former wicked Companions. I remember one whom I formerly knew, being at Sea, and in some Danger, express'd some Concern about his past Life and a future World: But when he was afterwards banter'd about it by his Acquaintance, and particularly by some, who were in the same Ship and Danger with him, (but had been more hardy) he was so far from resolving to make good any Engagements he had come under upon that Occasion, that he seem'd willing to deny all that he had said on that Head,
if

if they who then rally'd him upon that Head had not been themselves Ear Witnesses to it.

This may farther convince us, how necessary it is to have some Friends that will be faithful Monitors upon such an Occasion, to balance the Opposition or Impediments that may arise from another Set of People.

Direct. III. Depend upon, and pray earnestly for the Assistance of the Spirit of God. Beg that he would concur with your Endeavours, and effectually fix a due Sense of these Matters as a *sure Nail* in your Hearts, and that you may *obtain Mercy of him to be faithful*. And indeed, a lively Sense, and faithful Performance of such Vows, must flow from the Grace and Spirit of God, and therefore you should depend upon, and pray to him for it. And as fervent Prayers usually ac-

company such Vows when made, so should they follow them too. We must be Strangers to our selves, and to the Treachery of our own Hearts, (that are *deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked*) if we trust to them, and not to the Assistance and Conduct of the Spirit of God.

I am perswaded, many miscarry in this Matter, by trusting too much to the Strength of their own Resolutions, and their own imaginary Power and Abilities. This justly provokes God to withdraw his needed Aids and Conduct; and then how soon do those who are thus forsaken of God, break through the strongest Engagements, and throw off all Sense of Religion, as well as all Sense of the solemn Obligations to it, which they themselves, when in Trouble, had laid themselves under? And those Resolutions which they thought were so strong,

strong; as that they never could, or would be broken, do soon become of no force. Use therefore your Endeavours, but with a due Dependance upon the Grace and Spirit of God. Say and resolve with the Psalmist, *I will pay thee my Vows.* But then add also with him, — *O do not thou forsake me.* Always remember, that if you be good or do good, it is *by the Grace of God that you are what you are*, and do what you do.

Direct. IV. Let the Performance of them be *speedy*. *Solomon* is clear and full to this Purpose. *Eccles. v. 4. When thou vowest a Vow unto God defer not to pay it, for he hath no Pleasure in Fools: Pay that which thou hast vow'd.* 'Tis remarkable, that the wise Man seems to speak of *Delay of Payment*, and *Non-payment*, as much the same, or link'd nearly together. Many delay the Pay-

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ment

ment of their Vows, just as they do their Repentance and Conversion, under pretence of waiting for a more convenient Season: But Observation and Experience shew, that actually or constantly, the present Time is indeed the most convenient Season: And they who wait for a more convenient one, feldom or never find it at all.

As amongst Men, it is a Piece of Injustice unnecessarily to defer the Payment of a Debt after it is justly become due, and may be, and often is, a great and real Detriment to the Creditor: So we injure God when we do but even *delay* to pay what is so justly due to him, though we have it not in our Power to make him more or less happy; for if we be faithful in the Payment of our Vows, *if we be Righteous, what do we profit him?* We make no Addition to his essential Glory or
Hap-

Happiness, nor can we make any Diminution thereof by with-holding from him even that which is justly due: However, this does not lessen our Crime, or the Injustice of such Delays. And indeed, Men usually pass on from trifling and delaying, to a total Forgetfulness or Neglect. Delay will ever render us both *less able* and *less willing* to pay. If therefore you would not be rank'd amongst those who are call'd *Fools* so deservedly, *pay what you have vow'd*; and that there may be less Danger, less Unwillingness, and less Inability, *defer not* to pay. We have a Command or Direction to the same Purpose, *Dent. xxiii. 21. When thou shalt vow a Vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it.*

Some, after a short Delay come to a Determination to give themselves no farther Concern about the Payment of
the

the Vows they had made: Others unnecessarily put off the Payment, but still retain a faint Desire and Purpose to perform. How oddly would the Language of such a preceding Sound be, when turn'd into Words! "*Lord, my first Design and Desire is to take a little more Pleasure to my self, and to do thee some farther Injury, and then to make Amends for all. And I hope thou wilt, after all, enable me to perform, and accept my Performance.*" Amazing Folly indeed! As if our Lives and Times were in our own Hands, and not in God's, and that the divine Grace was entirely at our Command.

Direct. V. Let your Performance be *cheerful* and *willing*. It ought to be as much so as if you were yet in your Trouble, and knew that the Performance of what you had promis'd, would
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procure you certain Deliverance. And then I need not tell you with what Chearfulness and Willingness all would be speedily done. God loveth a *willing Mind*, and a *chearful Giver*. And I may also add, he loves a willing, chearful Performance of what has been promis'd. How insincere, how ungrateful, how ungenerous, is it to perform sparingly and grudgingly after a Deliverance, what was so liberally and readily promis'd before it? *I was glad*, says the Psalmist, *when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord*, Psal. cxxii. 1. So should *we be glad*, when *we go into the House of God*, upon the very Errand of *paying our Vows to him there, in the Courts of his House, and in the Presence of all his People*, Psal. cxvi. 18, 19.

Among Men, if a Gift be bestow'd, or Service done, and at the same Time the
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Person who receives the Favour, be taunted or upbraided therewith, this is look'd upon as sufficient to cancel all Obligations upon that Account. And what then must be thought of those who make the Performance of their Vows to God only a Matter of Force and Constraint, because they know not well how to get off? Is not this in Effect to upbraid and taunt the Almighty? And may he not then, instead of accepting such Payment, justly look upon the Offer as an Affront?

Direct. VI. Let your Performance be exact and complete. 'Tis true indeed, Failures there will be, there must be, whilst we are in the Body, attended with so many Infirmities, and surrounded with so many Snares and Temptations: But let us take Care that these be as few, and as little as may be. Alas! how vastly do our Performances, when out of
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Trouble, fall short of our Purposes and Promises when we are in it? We are ready and liberal in our Vows, but slow and sparing in our Performances. *Erasmus's* Story is generally known, of a Seaman who vow'd to a certain Saint a Wax Candle as big as a Mast, when he was in Danger from a Storm, but when he was in Safety thought a small Candle sufficient: This, no doubt, is a *Fable*, but yet the *Moral* of it is good. O be careful to make some better Proportion between your Promises and your Performances; pay your Vows to God, pay them *speedily*, pay them *willingly*, pay them *fully*.

And let the Failures which you are guilty of be your Shame and your Sorrow. Humble and abase your selves before God, for your great Deficiencies in your Payment; at the same Time that you are thankful to him, and

adore his rich Grace which has enabled you *in the main* to be faithful in your Performance. Humiliation for Failures is very consistent with Thankfulness to God, for any Disposition or Strength to perform; or rather, these two do most beautifully and agreeably correspond to each other.

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